



VALEDICTORY ADDRESS
TO
THE GRADUATES IN MEDICINE
OF THE
University of McGill College,
MONTREAL,

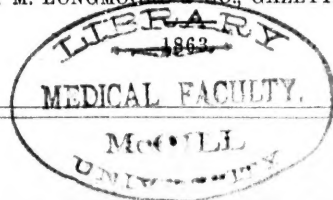
Delivered at the Annual Convocation, 5th May, 1893,

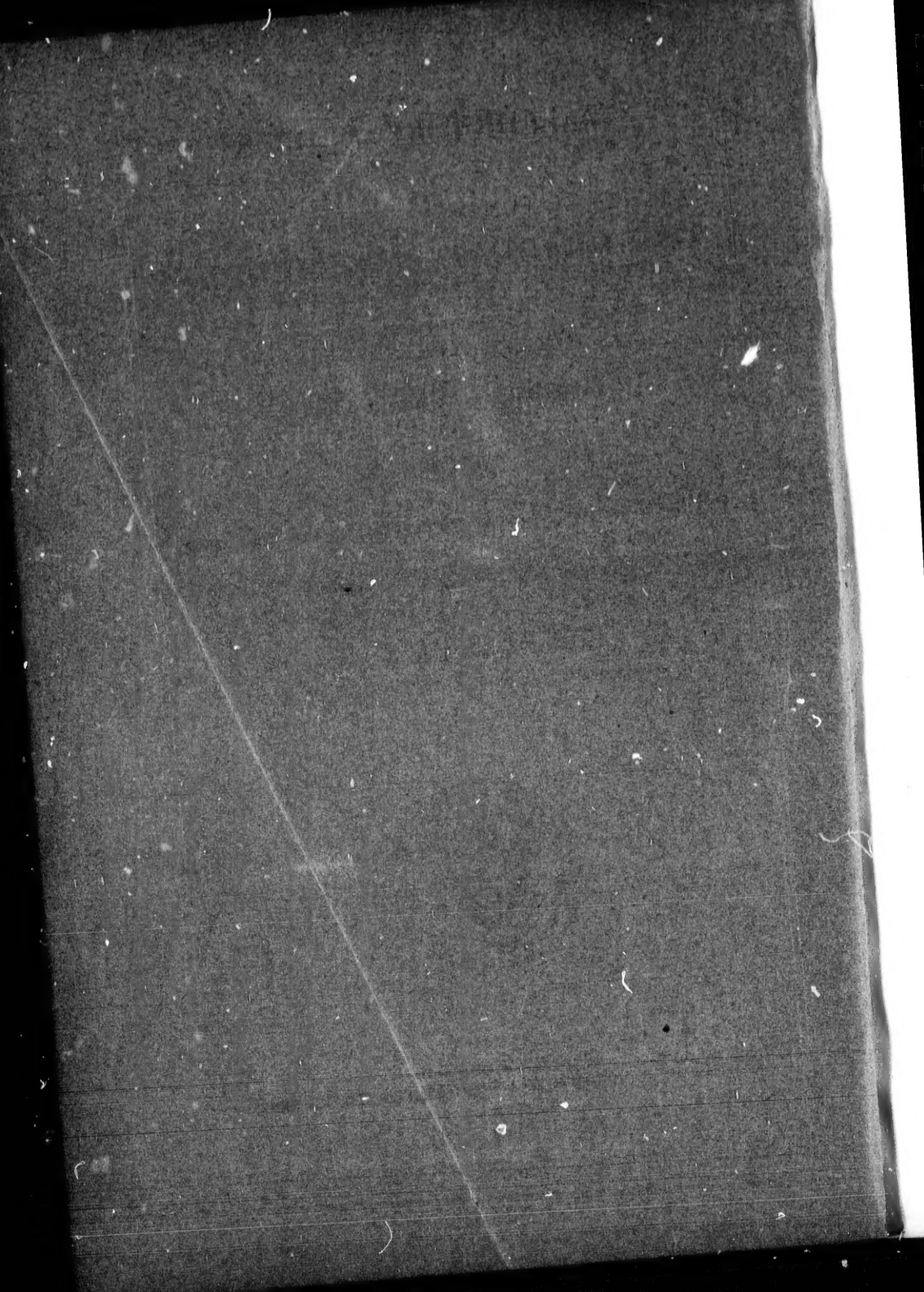
BY

ROBERT CRAIK, M. D.,
PROFESSOR OF CLINICAL SURGERY.



MONTREAL:
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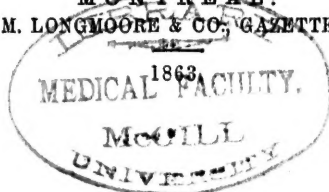
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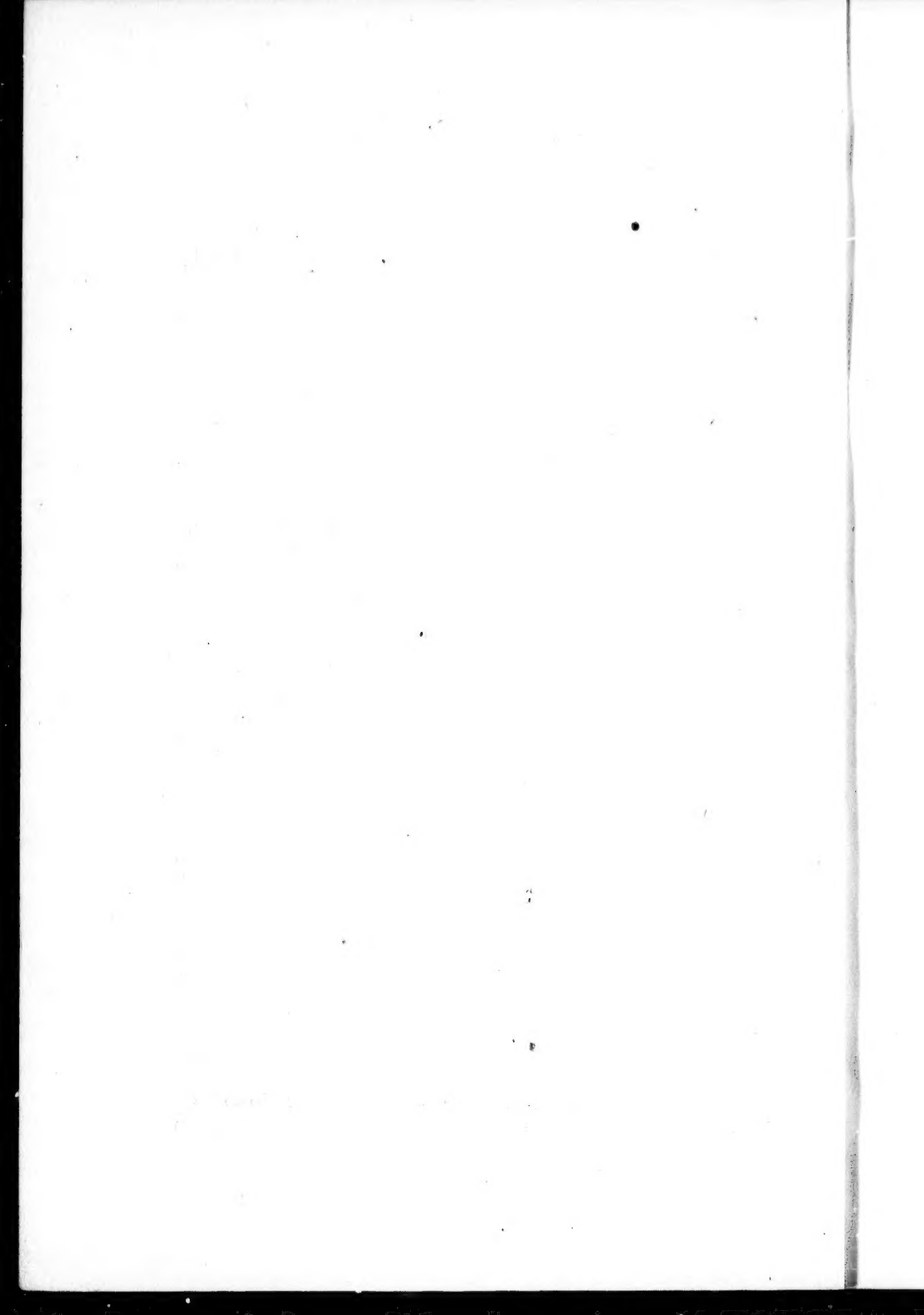
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ADDRESS.

Gentlemen :

The ceremony through which you have just passed is one which is well calculated to make a deep and lasting impression upon your minds, for it not only marks an important period of your lives, but it possesses a significance which, I trust, you fully comprehend and appreciate.

The University has this day conferred upon you the honour for which you have been striving during the last four years,—an honour which consists not merely in an empty title, but which implies your fitness for a position of influence and responsibility. You have completed the prescribed course of study, and your teachers, after a careful and searching examination, have declared you to be “learned in the Science of Medicine and Masters of the Art of Surgery”. But it cannot be pretended that entering this stately Hall as students only, you are to leave it as accomplished practical physicians. The ceremonial of to-day possesses no such magic influence,—it merely marks the point at which one part of your studies ends and another and more important part begins. It is with reference to this latter part of your studies that, in taking leave of you, I offer a few words of parting counsel.

Gentlemen, I trust that you are fully conscious of the importance of the duties on which you are now entering. You are assuming a vast responsibility. You have equipped yourselves like a band of warriors to ward off the attacks and to stop the ravages of the most insidious and the most insatiable of enemies ; and you must remember that yours is a very peculiar position. You are not to go forth as a united band, where a steady discipline will maintain you in your ranks, and where you will be cheered by the presence and support of your comrades. Each of you has to march forth alone, and must be prepared to act unsupported in any emergency which may arise. Not in the glare of day and before admiring spectators are your laurels to be won. In darkness and in solitude must your struggles be maintained.

Each of you who in after life shall practise his profession, will doubtless find himself in circumstances where, humanly speaking, life

or death is in his hands. He may be out of the reach of all additional assistance, or the danger may be so urgent that the time in his hands may be counted by seconds. A decision as to his line of practice must be come to on the spot. There is no time for consulting others, no opportunity for referring to books; and now if he be found wanting, how terrible is the result? Losses of almost every other kind may be made good, mistakes as to any other subject may be rectified; but the vital spark once fled,—no sacrifice, no effort, can restore it.

You will often hear it remarked of a timid or of an indolent physician or surgeon that, if he can do no good, he will at least do no harm; but a moment's reflection will show the utter fallacy of such a conclusion; for a doctor's sins of omission are quite as fatal as his sins of commission; and he who stands impotently by, or runs affrighted away, when a fellow-creature's life is in mortal peril and might be saved by prompt and skilful interference, is no more free from blood-guiltiness, than he who slays his victim by ignorant presumption or reckless officiousness.

To fit yourselves for the proper discharge of your responsible duties you must continue to be diligent students. Medicine is essentially a progressive science. The improvements of one year are constantly being superseded by discoveries in the next, and your duty to your patients requires you to furnish yourselves with every available means of resisting disease and death.

Gentlemen, the life which you have chosen is no mere pastime. You need not expect to dream away your time on beds of roses. Your life must be one of labour, for in every part of your career you will meet with difficulties to be surmounted, trials to be endured, and arduous duties to be performed.

In the earlier years of your practice, however qualified you may be, most of you will have to contend against neglect, distrust and prejudice ere you can convince the public that you deserve their confidence; and it will require all your fortitude to reconcile you to the slow process by which you are to win professional success, while your youthful ardour prompts you to carry the citadel of public confidence by storm.

You will also have to contend against what seem to be the prevailing weaknesses, if not the vices, of this age. I allude to scepticism and credulity. You will be jostled in your work by quacks and charlatans. You will find men writing books and delivering lectures to prove that all the science of medicine,—that is of regular medicine,—is mere guess-work or worse, and that all the labours of all the physicians since the earliest times have taught us absolutely nothing. These writers and

lecturers, however, never fail to add that *they* have somehow acquired the grand secret, and that *they* can readily cure all the ills that flesh is heir to, and especially such as are usually considered incurable.

But the wonder is not so much that ignorant and unscrupulous men should thus write and speak, but that so many believe their wholesale assertions; and it is not merely among the less educated classes that this fallacy prevails, for any one who observes what goes on around him, will soon see that even the best educated classes are largely infected with it.

Now, that this tendency to adopt the bold assertions of the quack doctors and to regard medicine as utterly devoid of a scientific foundation is a fallacy, it is impossible for any one to doubt who considers the subject with attention. The object of medicine being the cure of disease or the alleviation of suffering, it is plain that he who would succeed in it must make himself acquainted with the natural structure and functions of the human body, with the manner in which these are altered and affected by disease, with the natural characters of diseases themselves, with the nature and effects of remedies, and with the experience of past ages. Now in all this the student of medicine is merely doing for his subject, what every man does for whatever he may undertake. He is studying the facts and laws of nature as they concern his profession, and he brings to his aid that which the experience and sagacity of others have added to the common stock of knowledge.

Surely there can be no better conceivable method by which medicine ought to be learnt. He who is best acquainted with the objects of his profession, with the means at his disposal, and with the knowledge transmitted from past times, is certainly far more likely to prove a successful practitioner than he who despises study, and who, because in the treatment of the diseases affecting the wonderfully complex frame of man, absolute certainty has not been attained, at once asserts that medicine is unworthy the name of a science.

The common sense of the community in every-day matters contrasts favorably with their judgment in this respect. If a man's watch go seriously wrong, he does not trust it in the hands of one who has never studied the mechanism of watches. If a merchant's business be in disorder and bankruptcy stare him in the face, he does not seek the advice of those who have no knowledge of the laws which regulate commerce and finance; and yet these same men in matters where their own lives and the lives of their families are concerned, will trust blindly to him whose chief recommendation is, that he unsparingly abuses all

medicine except his own panacea and all medical men except himself.

You must be prepared to find many examples of the fallacy I allude to, but you must never lose sight of the true principle; that he who most carefully and conscientiously studies a subject, must infallibly, other things being equal, become the best qualified in regard to it, and that his fellow citizens will sooner or later find this out.

But the profession itself is not entirely innocent in this matter; carelessness or routine may bring the practice of medicine into disrepute, or the mistakes of one age may prepare the way for quackery in the next. Had it not been for the abuse of drugs during the last century, the doctrine of infinitesimal doses would have been impossible in the present. But even within the profession itself there is much quackery, and it is this which is most dangerous, because more insidious and more difficult to be guarded against. Traitors in the camp are more to be dreaded than foes in the open field. The worst enemies of legitimate medicine are often its professed friends.

From all such crooked paths let me most emphatically warn you. Let it be your object never to commit an action or to say a word you could afterwards be ashamed of. By never making professions which you do not conscientiously feel that you can fully carry out, by never seeking to advance your own interests at the expense of another's, you will preserve your own self-respect, and you are sure to merit and to obtain the approbation of others.

But, gentlemen, supposing that you have surmounted all the difficulties incident to the earlier part of your career, and have established yourselves in ample practice, your troubles are by no means at an end. The public can have no conception, and you yourselves but a faint one, of all the stern realities of a doctor's life. How few will give him credit for his quiet endurance, his anxious watchings, his baffled hopes, his untiring self-sacrifice? See him in the full tide of his professional career; what a life of anxious troubled unrest, what exorbitant exactions are made upon his resources, what unthinking demands upon his time and his vital energies? By day and by night, in sunshine and in storm, on work-day and on the day of rest, for rich and for poor, with or without recompense, he must ever obey the call of suffering humanity.

And again, he must be ever ready to encounter accidents, disease, and death, in all their most appalling forms; when friends are paralyzed with fear, when contagion carries panic to the stoutest hearts, he must be there calm and unmoved. Life may be ebbing fast through the bleeding artery, the shattered limb, the victim of cholera may present the most hideous features of death whilst yet writhing in vital

agony, delirium or convulsions may compress the energies of a life in a few, brief, racking, fatal hours, and still he must be there, battling manfully, and it may be impotently, with busy death.

But, it may be asked, what is it that induces you voluntarily to undergo such difficulties and trials as I have attempted to describe? I reply. Your chief incentive must be an ardent love for your profession. If you have not this love you had better turn back at once, for assuredly without it you will never be a credit to yourselves nor to the profession whose name you bear. But the profession of medicine is one well qualified to enlist our warmest feelings. It consists of the constant and eager pursuit of truth, and the application of that truth to the relief of suffering and the promotion of human happiness. It embraces the most comprehensive study of nature and endeavours to utilize knowledge in every department of science.

It is this ardent love for his profession which explains much in the conduct of the practitioner of medicine that is incomprehensible to the public or that is misconstrued. Herein lies the secret of that singular characteristic of our profession—the eagerness to work for nothing. This is why we see young men contest with a vigour and often at a pecuniary cost equal to those expended for a seat in parliament, the privilege of working gratuitously in our hospitals and dispensaries. Governors and the general public are mostly unable to recognize any but the sordid motive of worldly advantage. They see the earnest applications, the voluminous circulars and testimonials, the active canvass from door to door, and they not unnaturally conclude that what is solicited at so great a cost of time, trouble, and even of personal dignity, must possess a commensurate pecuniary value. The simple fact is, that medicine and everything connected with it is progressive. It is progressive as an abstract branch of knowledge, and it is progressive as regards every individual who follows it as a profession. The medical man is always and above all a student. Deprive him of the means of observing disease and you render him miserable. Not because he is enamoured of disease, still less because the sight of human agony has any attraction; not because the employment is profitable in a pecuniary sense, but because he feels that without the opportunity of observation the knowledge he possesses will decay, the faculties which are strengthened by exercise will grow torpid, and the skill that is acquired by practice will be lost.

Actuated as you are, gentlemen, by love for your profession, you must pursue it with earnestness of purpose. What was it that inspired the courage and foreshadowed the successes of an Alexander, a

Hannibal, a Cæsar, and a Napoleon? What embalmed the memories of Newton, of Milton, and of Herschell? What was it that enabled Arkwright and Watt and Stephenson to revolutionize the physical world? What was it in our own profession that has rendered the names of Sydenham, and Harvey, and Hunter, and Jenner, "familiar in the mouth as household words"? It was,—take it as the most solemn truth which the history of these men proclaims,—that they possessed earnestness of purpose. To them life was no plaything, time was no bauble. So it should be with you, so with all, in every calling in life, who desire to achieve success. Earnestness of purpose will overcome defects of early education, it will compensate for the lack of genius, and it will give pledges of success which will prove the true harbingers of greatness.

And now, gentlemen, in conclusion, what is to reward you for your toils and struggles? Not wealth,—for in no other profession are large fortunes so rarely amassed. Not heraldic honours,—for no coronet has ever graced the brow of a physician. Had such been your ambition you should have plunged among the "glorious uncertainties of the law" to "perplex and dash maturest counsels," have marched amid the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war," or mixed in the noisy turmoil of party politics. No, gentlemen, your reward must be sought in the consciousness of having contributed to the welfare and happiness of your race, in the respect and esteem of your fellow-men, and in the knowledge that you are humbly following in the footsteps of the Great Physician who went about continually doing good.

Go, then, gentlemen, on your mission of mercy. Do battle honestly and manfully in the cause of humanity; and when at last—worn out or stricken down—you fall with the harness on; though for you may not resound the boom of cannon or the blast of trumpets, yet your memory shall not lack the more touching tribute of the grateful sigh and the silent tear.

